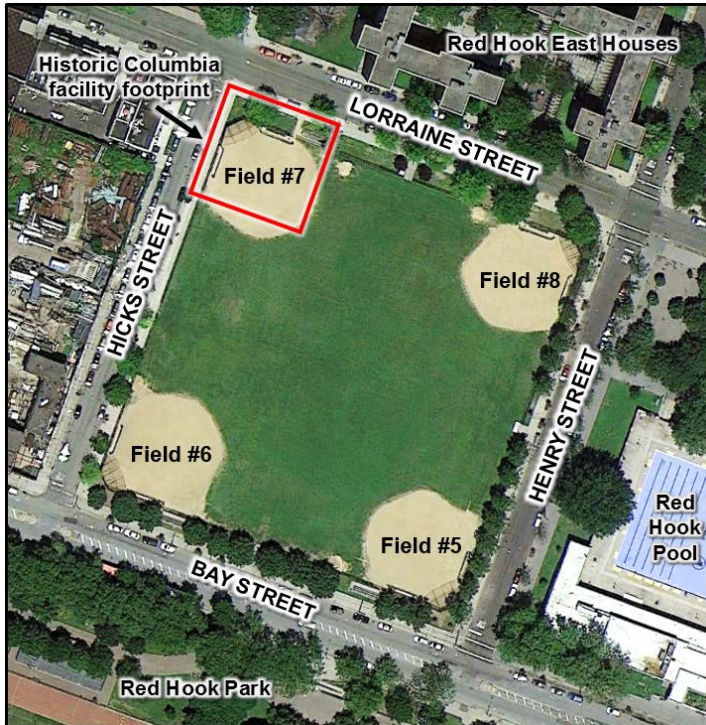




# EPA Investigates Former Lead Smelting Facility near Red Hook Ball Fields; Cleanup Required

Community Update No. 2

Early Spring 2015



## WHY DID EPA SAMPLE THE BALL FIELDS?

During the 1920s and 1930s, several metal companies including Columbia Smelting and Refining Works (Columbia) operated on the corner of Hicks and Lorraine Streets. By 1940, the smelter was demolished. The block then became four baseball fields and two cricket courts which are part of Red Hook Park. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is investigating the ball fields, and other areas nearby, to find out if lead from the old Columbia Smelting and Refining Works is in the soil. Once the areas with lead from Columbia are identified, a soil cleanup will be planned.

## WHAT HAS THE SITE INVESTIGATION FOUND?

In October 2014, the EPA took soil samples from the ball fields and several surrounding areas, including the Red Hook East Houses. The soil samples were analyzed and the results showed that:

- elevated lead levels were found in many locations at different soil depths throughout the area that was sampled
- the highest lead levels in soil samples were more than an inch below the surface of the ground
- soil samples taken from near the footprint of the former facility and along Henry Street contained lead which probably came from emissions from the former Columbia facility
- soil samples taken from grassy fenced areas within Red Hook East Houses showed elevated lead levels unrelated to the Columbia site, but residents aren't likely to come in contact with the elevated lead unless they dig into the ground surface
- additional sampling at the Red Hook East Houses is not necessary at this time

## WHAT IS SECONDARY LEAD SMELTING?

Secondary lead smelting plants refine scrap or used lead materials into metallic lead of a higher purity. Such materials can include the lead plates from batteries, lead pipe or metal sheets that contain lead. Secondary smelting can be responsible for releasing lead into the surrounding environment through lead fume emissions. Lead dust and smoke can be released during the smelting process, and slag contaminated with lead may be left over after the smelting process.

## WHY IS LEAD A PROBLEM?

Lead is a toxic metal that was used for many years in paint and leaded gasoline. Lead poisoning can cause a number of harmful health effects, particularly in children under the age of six.

Exposure to lead in soil can occur when children play in the dirt and put their hands or dusty toys in their mouths. Lead can also get into your body by breathing or swallowing lead dust, or by eating soil containing lead.

**If you would like information about the site please contact:**

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**If you would like information on other environmental concerns or the Superfund hazardous waste program contact:**

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**Visit the EPA's website at:**

[www.epa.gov/region2/superfund/removal/columbia](http://www.epa.gov/region2/superfund/removal/columbia)

**WHY ARE BALL FIELDS #5-8 CLOSED?**

While elevated lead levels at the ground surface are not an immediate health threat, further efforts to reduce exposure to soil are appropriate at the ball fields. The severe winter left some areas of ball fields #5-8 with bare soil, so NYC Parks has planted more grass seed and needs to let it grow undisturbed for 21-28 days, as the grass cover helps to reduce exposure to lead in the soil. These fields should open in late April 2015.

In addition, hand washing stations and boot scrubbers will be provided at entrances to the ball fields. Removing the dirt from your shoes and washing your hands and before eating or leaving the area will further minimize exposure to lead in soil.

**ONGOING INVESTIGATION AND CLEANUP PLANS**

In March 2015, EPA collected more soil samples from the block where the Columbia facility once stood as well as several other athletic fields and other areas of Red Hook Park. The results of this round of sampling, which are due back in late spring 2015, will help EPA determine if contamination from the former Columbia operations extends beyond Henry Street throughout Red Hook Park. Once the contaminated areas are better defined, a cleanup will be conducted by the EPA or the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) to protect public health in the long term. Planning for and designing the cleanup will probably take about a year.

**HOW WILL I GET THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION?**

Once EPA receives sampling results and determines the next steps, EPA will provide updates on the status of additional sampling and cleanup efforts. EPA will be available to explain the sampling results and answer questions.

**SIMPLE STEPS TO REDUCE YOUR LEAD EXPOSURE**

The following steps are recommended to reduce your potential exposure to lead contamination that may be present in urban soils.

- Remove shoes at the door before entering your home to prevent tracking in any dirt that may be on your shoes. Clean the bottom of your shoes with a wet wipe or paper towel.
- Wash your hands and face after visiting these ball fields and always before eating, drinking, or smoking.
- Avoid digging into or disturbing soil below the surface of the ball fields.